

11 December 1944

Cpl. John J. Morris, radio operator gunner, was on a mission to Vienna, Austria on 11 December 1944 when the plane piloted by F/O Herman T. Kennedy was hit by flak. Returning crews observed the aircraft leave the formation but were unable to determine the fault or disposition. This is John's story, in his words:

I was awakened at 4:00 AM by a man with a flashlight who said "Get out of bed, you are flying a mission." After breakfast and briefing we learned we were flying in the lead box. At daybreak we were crossing the Adriatic. Our target was Vienna, Austria south east goods factory - and the bad luck began. We reached the target only to find a string of B-17s going over Vienna. That forced us to make a circle and return to the IP.

The bombardier called "bombs away" and seconds later a shower of steel shrapnel struck an engine on the left. The plane nearly rolled over and I was stunned briefly. The engineer did help me. Three engines were on fire, the controls were cut and the ball turret was shattered. There were many holes through the fuselage.

The pilot signaled the crew to bail out. I was the first out. The plane went into a nose dive and a lazy spiral. It hit the ground with a dark red ball of flame and then black smoke. We had all parachuted out at 25,000 feet. We landed in Hungary and the plane crashed in Czechoslovakia.

I landed in very large field missing two yokes of oxen by about ten feet. A farmer was standing still in a nearby hedgerow. Lucky for me I had landed on the plowed side, it was softer.

There was a barrage of shooting in my direction. I took off my chute, put up my hands and walked toward the shooters. They then stopped firing, there was a group of about twelve soldiers and twelve civilians. They unloaded my pockets.

The men with guns lined up like a firing squad. I kept my hands raised and they backed me up against a load of hay. I expected to be shot. Then a little old lady in black looked into my face and started spitting at me. She looked like a character from Lil Abner and my face was covered with her spit.

The soldiers then led me down a dirt road to a jail. They treated me very well and one of the soldiers returned my Saint Mary's ring to me. At this point I joined several of the other members of the crew.

Later we were taken to a large stable filled with straw. There were about 150 people outside who watched through the night. I believe we were near Papa, Hungary. All of our guards were Hungarian. The following morning, we started walking on dirt roads and paths. We finally arrived at a large mansion.

When we arrived, there were some Russians there, prisoners like us, and a German officer and a pretty girl having their dinner. We spent the night in a side room of the mansion.

The next morning our crew was taken by truck to the train station in Tata, Hungary. We now had WWII German guards, and they all carried weapons. We were then taken to Budapest on the Danube river. There we were put into solitary in a cold dungeon with only a cot and a thin blanket.

There was one Hungarian guard, my guard, who was a real friend. One day he brought his girlfriend into my cell and they spent a lot of time trying with motions to teach me speech. A few days later my friendly Hungarian guard took me to another room, the interrogation room.

In the room was a huge middle-aged German officer with two young German soldiers on each side of his desk. The inquisitor asked me questions, and I told him, "I can say only my name, rank and serial number." The big man exploded, "If I bombed your home I would get a kick in the ass." He tried to grab me and fell across the desk.

The next day we were going west. My friendly guard had given me a big round loaf of bread and a tin of horse meat. Pest was nearly surrounded by the Russian Army troops. We were returned to Vienna on the same train that we had arrived on.

Later we were strafed by four Lightning planes. We went to Dulag Luft in Wetzlar where our officers left us. Then we went to Berlin, eight days with no food and water, from there to Luchenthalde in Stalag 3A. When liberated by the Russians we walked to the Elbe river and our last camp in Europe -- Camp Lucky Strike.

My wife and I returned to Hungary for a visit after the war. We enjoyed it very much.

John Morris.